



Patrice Peterson
President

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Robert D. Rinker
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GENERAL ASSEMBLY
LABOR AND PUBLIC EMPLOYEES COMMITTEE
Room 3800, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

RE: H.B. 5465 - An Act Concerning Family and Medical Leave Benefits for
Certain Municipal Employees

Senator Prague, Representative Zalaski, and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee:

My name is Janette Smith, and I am a paraprofessional at Mansfield Middle School in Mansfield Public Schools.

I am submitting this testimony in support of legislation that would correct a long-standing disparity that unfairly impacts public school paraeducators in Connecticut.

Parents and elected officials are now beginning to understand that as paraprofessionals, we have some of the most demanding jobs in a school, but many members of the public either do not know who we are or what we do. We frequently work one-on-one with special needs students, particularly the ever-growing number with an Autism Spectrum Disorder.

However, there are many important benefits and considerations that are not afforded to our paraprofessionals, but are to teachers, school administrators, and other public employees.

The reality is that in Connecticut, paraprofessionals do not legally have access to the rights granted under the Family and Medical Leave Act. We do not work the minimum 1,250 total hours per year required by federal law, yet many of us are considered full-time employees.

In my own situation, with access to unpaid family and medical leave time I would have been able to take time off last year in order to care for my terminally ill father. I would have been able to do so knowing that my position would be intact upon my return to work.

Amending the law so that all school employees have access to Family and Medical Leave Act protections is commonsense and fundamentally fair. **The 2,500 public school paraprofessionals in my Union and I respectfully urge you to support HB 5465 to correct the inequity we face today.**

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Janette Smith

Instructional Assistant, Mansfield Middle School
Vice-President, Paraprofessional Council, CSEA/SEIU Local 2001

JS:dmo